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Reagan rule is 'government by euphemism,' ex-CIA agent says

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CASPER — The government, in particular the Reagan administration, is tightening its grip on information, and censoring freedom of speech, according to a former CIA operative whose book on Vietnam was censored by the nation's intelligence agency.

Frank Snapp, a guest speaker at the Casper College Social Science Seminar, admitted the executive branch has the power to censor, but where to draw the line remains uncertain.

The line, under the Reagan Administration, has all but disappeared, Snapp said. The present administration has given the country "government by euphemism," he said, and argues that despite the First Amendment "the Constitution doesn't really mean what it says."

"Your freedom of speech and of the press is by no means absolute," he told seminar audiences Friday.

The government has 1.4 million top secret items on file, Snapp said, and no one monitors whether some of the documents should be classified.

During a span of nine months in 1982-83, 800,000 documents were given questionable secrecy classifications, while another 600,000 documents were classified



FRANK SNAPP
Censored by CIA

by people who are not authorized to do so, he said.

The administration has a "media phobia" due in part to the administration's "arrogant disregard" for outsiders and the press, he said.

Repeatedly during the invasion of Grenada, the administration proved that the "without the press along, government can not be trusted to tell the truth," he said.

The government inflated the number of Cubans on the island from 100 to 1,000, he said. The

invasion itself was not a surgical operation as the government lead the public to believe, he said. And he said it was only after the press arrived, that the public learned that U.S. jets had bombed a mental hospital.

Reagan has been urged to "bring the press to heel" by cutting the flow of information, offering tedious technical detail to back administration policy and keeping his own staff in the dark about future plans to prevent leaks, Snapp said.

Without even consulting Congress, the president used presidential directive to invade Grenada, Snapp said.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the public does not have a constitutionally assured right to access to government papers, he said. The Carter administration tried to suppress the printing of an article on how to make a hydrogen bomb in a magazine printed in the Midwest, "The Progressive," although the information was obtained in books, Snapp added.

Snapp took the censorship of his Vietnam book to the Supreme Court and lost. Under the Supreme Court ruling in his case, Snapp said, the Pentagon Papers would not have been published.

The Reagan administration has wounded the Freedom of Information Act, he said.